

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for March 1, 2000

Agenda Items

Schematic Design Briefing on NE 45th and Pacific Street Stations
Briefing on McClellan Station potential below-grade alternative

Commissioners Present

Jon Layzer, Chair
Matthew Kitchen
Carolyn Law
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Rick Sundberg
Paul Tomita

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Marty Curry, Planning Commission
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission
John Rahaim, Design Commission
Cheryl Sizov, LRRP

The meeting opened with introductions of Commissioners, staff, guests, and the newest addition to the Panel, Carolyn Law, representing the Arts Commission. Carolyn stated she is an artist with experience with a variety of public art projects and clients, including transportation-related projects. She is also a former Design Commissioner.

Jon Layzer and Cheryl Sizov discussed the upcoming schedule of LRRP meetings, including the March 24th retreat. Phil Harrison briefly described the permit process for light rail, including Design Guidelines for light rail that will be made a part of the permit process. Cheryl described the Design Guidelines in more detail, stating they would be drafted by CityDesign staff in coordination with other City and Sound Transit staff, then reviewed and adopted by LRRP, and approved by the DCLU Director.

Meeting notes from January 26, 2000 were reviewed and approved as written.

Schematic Design Briefing on NE 45th and Pacific Stations

Dennis Haskell, PSRC

Don Miles, ZGF

Mary Jo Porter, Sound Transit

We are vigorously engaged with the University of Washington in developing a Memorandum of Agreement to define where and how to build light rail stations on campus, and hope to have an agreement signed by the end of March. We will be going to the Regents Capital Assets Committee on March 16th—their review will be a critical step in the process—and will be holding a community forum on March 13th. As you hear this design presentation, please keep in mind that we currently don't have any agreement or permission to build on University property. We are also working with the landscape committee, and are hoping to meet soon with the Architectural Review Board. There are two parallel considerations—the regional aspect of the system, plus the University's desires for something that will be compatible with campus structures.

The last time LRRP saw University station design work was in August of 1999. At that time, we didn't yet have artists on the team, but now do—Dan Corson, Tad Savinar, and Norie Sato. The artists are waiting until 30% design is complete before proposing where to spend art dollars within the system, and what

ideas to pursue at each station. In the meantime, we're working together to develop conceptual ideas about art elements.

Each of the two University District stations is distinct from the other, with different relationships to the community and campus. At NE 45th and 43rd, the relationship focuses on the Burke and Henry Museums with their collections of art and artifacts, and showcasing of objects. At Pacific, the relationship focuses on the U.W. medical center and other sciences, along with proximity to the water. All four station entrances (two per station) are located along 15th Avenue NE, that "seam" between the campus and the business district. The zipper analogy is still important vis a vis creating an amenity along 15th by softening the campus edge and creating a rapport between the campus and business district. But we are expanding the seam concept to also include some east/west connections. NE 45th and 43rd act like ribs to the spine of the "Ave" and seem most appropriately to be under the stewardship of the community and business district, while some of the other east/west streets would seem to be appropriate for University stewardship. For example, we are working with the U.W. campus plan in incorporating a terraced open space and possible diagonal connection to Memorial Way. The Law School has also been affected by the 43rd Street entrance; while at Pacific station, the north entrance has been impacted by expansion plans for Gould Hall. Key considerations for the 45th Street entrance include:

- Creating a portal into campus—a physical and symbolic entrance
- An potential entrance to the Burke if it expands at its current site
- Bicycle connection to 17th Avenue with storage and a direct path to the station
- Doors oriented to the street and very visible as a wayfinding element
- Plaza space with easy connection to adjacent sidewalk, ledge seating, canopy of trees
- Natural, green edge along 45th retained while still opening views into campus

Considerations for the entrance at 43rd include:

- Another possible entrance to the Burke Museum and café, and Law School
- Gradual ramp east to a connection with Memorial Way
- Specially designed bus shelters, bike racks, and other amenities along the 15th edge
- Elimination or lowering of the campus wall

The headhouses are designed in pairs for each station. At 45th, they are envisioned as glowing glass beacons or lanterns—illuminated, airy, light—and with a scale that is more akin to campus landscape features than buildings. The needle and roof act as an invitation to enter. We would orient the narrow side to 15th in order to keep an open connection to campus. There is intended to be a dialogue between these two stations.

At Pacific, the model shows the many new buildings the University is proposing for this area. These entrances are also designed as beacons of glowing glass, but omni-directional as opposed to bi-directional at 45th. At the north entrance, the key factor is relationship to the Burke Gilman Trail. Here we are proposing a bike center with café and valet storage to activate the plaza area. The headhouse is oriented to the north and visible to 15th. The south entrance is a good opportunity for park space and to give identity to the south campus area. There is also room for queuing on game days by splitting the activity between the two entrances. These entrances are not a matched set, but instead have similar yet slightly different configurations.

With respect to the tunnel, we're trying to show the "idealized world" as opposed to the "real world" shown at-grade. We are also differentiating the areas below ground for wayfinding purposes. using the platforms as "great rooms" with vaulted ceilings—vaguely Collegiate Gothic at 45th and science-related at Pacific. There would be vitrines for sacred objects/artwork. We want to break the underground areas into smaller scaled spaces for intimacy within this long chamber.

The art concepts to date include;

- Glass beacon, needle, and vitrine idea—the needle balanced on the other end by the roof drain for a yin/yang effect
- A colonnade of sculptures at 43rd
- Stone walls connected to the vent system as opportunities for carved art
- At 45th, cultural objects within the tunnel—chandeliers celebrating the majesty of the University
- Nature and biology highlighted at the Pacific station, with contemporary gargoyles, carnivorous plants imagery, micro/macro view of the world
- Fiber optic lights evoking images of the body's circulation system
- Kinetic art with water

Discussion

- Please work closely with Cheryl and John Rahaim on the ongoing coordination with the University so that LRRP can stay abreast of any developments that occur.
- Will the elevators open directly onto the plaza? *(Yes.) And will they be metal? (Yes, stainless steel. They are also being designed to open on both sides at 45th if desired.)*
- To what extent has there been discussion of 43rd street improvements? *(The premise is that the Ave and 43rd is still part of the business district, and you wouldn't see any campus elements or imagery until you reach 15th. There would be an urban treatment with a wider sidewalk and treets, maybe some special paving.)*
- Where does your scope end and Seatran's begin? *(ST Board identified a set of improvements along 43rd and are floating the idea of the City taking the lead on these with ST funding. Rob Gorman is working with the community on this.) The Arts Commission wants to put some funds into it for art.)*
- Transforming 15th is an important issue, as is improvements to 43rd for bicycles and pedestrians, bus connections, façade changes, etc. Where are the lines being drawn between ST's responsibility and someone else's? Are bike linkages part of the ST scope? We're very interested in redevelopment of 15th Avenue in conjunction with station development. *(The U.W. is in the midst of a campus plan and still drawing its own conclusions. They are the property owners and have the final say on what happens on their property.)*

At this point, a University representative confirmed that they are working on the master plan, that Burke expansion isn't yet definite, and that they are very interested in tearing down the wall. Jon Layzer reiterated the Panel's desire to be kept abreast of all developments and potential changes to ST's design based on coordination with the U.W. He asked whether the U.W. and Sound Transit projects are similarly timed, or if not, whether there would be interim improvements. Paul Bay replied that ST is building a light rail system foremost, and not rebuilding 15th Avenue, although they will be spending substantial money there. Discussion continued:

- Between the two Link stations, the Law School, and potentially the Burke, two blocks of 15th Avenue will be rebuilt. We all have the opportunity to set a standard here for future improvements.

- We need to ensure that ST's investment today is part of a longer term vision and not torn out later. *(Yes, this needs to be—and is—a collaboration.)*
- Is the University's consultant looking at all of 15th Avenue? *(Yes.)*
- Related to the art program, how often might the objects in vitrines be changed? *(Still thinking about this.)*
- This seems like a lot of sculpture commissions to me. The needle, waterworks, and glass ideas are all intriguing, but I think if it is going to be the Burke station, the vitrines needs to be aggressively programmed. If it isn't going to be the Burke station, you should consider moving in another direction. I am uncomfortable with the vitrines. *(But we aren't trying to create the Burke Museum downstairs.)*
- As you prioritize the STart funds, you may find it more feasible and economical to let the Burke fill the spaces. *(This is a broader idea of showcasing sacred objects and the relationship between culture and commerce.)*
- My concern is with commissioning sculptures and then that's it—this becomes the "sculpture station." Things that go into a vitrine just end up staying there, and I feel the station should be more dynamic. *(There are security issues with placing an actual collection there. Also, this is not just the Burke's station—they are even looking at other sites and could conceivably relocate.)*
- This concept isn't compelling enough yet. *(I agree with your sculpture station comment, and also don't want that.)*
- Form the partnership with the institution to curate the vitrines.
- I think we still need to have a discussion focused on public art for the system to discuss these issues further. The idea of a relationship between ST and cultural institutions is still a good one to pursue.
- Where is the community represented in these images? There is a richness there that isn't expressed in either of these stations. I realize you don't want a hodge podge of elements, and yet it seems there should be room to express all aspects of the University District, not just the University itself.
- Will bikes be accommodated at the north station? *(Yes, storage behind the headhouse, plus the trail to 17th.)*
- The design is elegant and clean. I'm excited by the glass lantern concept. But I'm curious how you will meld the cool elegance with the eclectic vitality of the artwork? Also, I love the roof drain idea, but please don't let the water simply go into a hole in the ground when it reaches the base! Carry the water theme over to the Pacific station as well.
- Yes, this is a handsome, strong, and elegant design. What do you think the University's reaction will be? *(We recently prepared a slide show to use in showing our work to the Board or Regents and the Architectural Review Committee. In the show we try to capture the soul of the campus, then show how it is referenced in the light rail station design. Then we'll link it with the community's image and ST's own identity. Still working on that link. The use of glass corresponds to ST; the use of sandstone corresponds to the campus.)*
- How will the plazas work for system users? *(We hope to activate the space at 45th/43rd with the Burke café. There is also a natural amphitheatre there for other programmed uses to occur. At Pacific, there is one plaza that is more active than the other.)*
- Where is ticketing? *(At the plaza within the zone delineated with paving under the canopy.)*
- Between the University and Safeco which are responsible for putting a lot of transit passes into people's hands, I suspect the ticket vending won't be that big an issue. *(There will be 25,000 people getting on and off at this station.)*
- I appreciate the pairing of stations versus four different ideas, plus the thoughtfulness of the subterranean areas. I would recommend further exploration of a public/private partnership regarding the colonnade idea. Lastly, at Pacific station, the bike facilities are an important part of the concept but don't show up within the design as strongly as they could.

- I agree with the quality of the design. The orientation details and treatment of 15th clearly depend on the U.W. or other parties, so it is hard to go further with that in these designs.
- Bring something in of the community's identity/imagery so the station design isn't dominated by the University.
- You could consider bringing some elements of the U.W. across the street (15th) to mix it up a bit.

Noting the time, Jon then asked for a motion from the Panel.

Recommendation

The Panel thanks the consultants for a thorough and beautifully rendered presentation, and recommends approval of the schematic designs as presented for the NE 45th and Pacific Street Stations. The Panel compliments the consultants on the clean, elegant design of the two pairs of headhouses, including the incorporation of drainage as a water feature at NE 45th; the inclusion of a bicycle facility at Pacific; and the attention paid to subterranean spaces.

The Panel is nonetheless wrestling with the extent to which the design of station entrances, the surrounding site improvements, and improvements within the station successfully achieve the LRRP's design principle to "fit within the... context of the surrounding neighborhood, affirming local characteristics...". The Panel recognizes the challenge of reflecting such a diverse context in station architecture, but requests further examination and development of design ideas in the following areas:

- ***Further development of station designs and related site improvements to affirm the local context:*** While the University appears to be well-expressed in the station designs, there is not a corresponding relationship to the character and identity of the University District including the "Ave" merchants and culture, surrounding residential neighborhood, and other institutional uses.
- ***Further evaluation of the art and architecture program at the station platforms:*** Although the concept for vaulted chambers relate well to the University in both the formal (at 45th and 43rd), and abstract (at Pacific/life sciences), the "vitrine" concept of showcasing precious objects needs additional consideration; e.g. what objects would be showcased; are the objects intended to serve as a rotating exhibit; is there a relationship between the objects and the Burke Museum and/or Henry Gallery, and if so how might the objects be curated; and lastly, how else might the art program be expressed and draw inspiration from its context.
- ***Further exploration of formal partnerships with the Burke, Henry, and other cultural and neighborhood institutions is recommended:*** In the event that participation by or partnership with such institutions is not be feasible or cost effective in terms of displaying collections of precious materials, a less involved approach (such as display cases for posters, enamel panels with historical notices, handbills, or posters, and bronze inlays) may still be worthy of exploration.
- ***Continued coordination with the City, University, and community on street improvements for 15th Avenue NE, NE 43rd Street, and other streets as deemed appropriate:*** The Panel applauds the joint discussions that have taken place to date, and supports coordinating capital projects in order to obtain the greatest public benefit possible with existing funds in addition to the opportunity to create a seamless and integrated design.
- ***Further development of the detailing and programming for station plazas, with special attention to the needs of cyclists and connections to the surrounding community:*** The Panel notes that this appears to be well-handled at the NE 45th station, but needs more attention at Pacific.

In addition, the Panel requests regular updating on the progress of Sound Transit's discussions with the University (Board of Regents, Architectural Review Committee, and any others) in order to stay abreast of design changes and developments.

Briefing on McClellan Station Below-Grade Alternative

Jim Parsons, PSTC

Mary Jo Porter, Sound Transit

Due to the presence of utilities underground, there are significant conflicts with a below-grade alignment. It could be done as cut and cover but would still require boring some portions of the alignment. A below-grade alignment wouldn't reach the surface until Walden Street, and would create an 1100-foot open portal versus 700 feet for the aerial alignment. And below-grade would be very costly—about \$65 million more than the aerial alignment.

Discussion

- Prior to the LPA when a Rainier Valley tunnel was being discussed, what was the estimated cost of a tunnel? *(Just over \$400 million.)*
- Are there implications for the Beacon Hill station and tunnel? *(It would increase the grade.)*
- Where would the station be with a below-grade alignment? *(In the same place with the same orientation.)*
- What about net costs? *(There could be some r-o-w savings along MLK with an at-grade option, but not significant.)*
- Construction impacts? *(More significant with cut and cover. Traffic would be about the same. We can always put decking on the street to allow traffic flow while working underground.)*
- I'm looking for some of the SAP input regarding access impacts. The backyard to the alignment is the hill. *(This area is slated for a town center on the east side of the station.)*

Jon interjected that he wants to make sure the Panel and Sound Transit talk about how they'll work together. He recapped the Panel's work to date, stating that they had wrestled with having a voice in major system issues and felt very "behind" in commenting on Convention Place and McClellan. He acknowledged Sound Transit's concerns about not creating uncertainty before the Full Funding Grant Agreement is settled, but reminded everyone that the Panel commented on McClellan prior to the LPA decision even though some of that message didn't get out to decisionmakers. With an extension to Northgate pending, the Panel wants to go on record as wanting to be a part of that alignment decision-making process in order to avoid finding themselves in the same spot as with McClellan. Nonetheless, Jon acknowledged Sound Transit's schedule and the need to wrap up the discussion on McClellan. Mary Jo Porter then stepped forward to say that they know people (community, LRRP, City) are unhappy with the design to date, and are therefore pledging to slow down enough to rethink the design—not the aerial alignment, but the station design itself. She also acknowledged the Panel's interest in being part of the Northgate discussion, and added that key staff have already been alerted. Lastly, Mary Jo made a personal commitment to attending LRRP meetings as much as possible, or asking Paul Bay to attend if she is not able.

Paul Tomita applauded the decision to slow down, and said he firmly believes the McClellan station area could be the most vibrant in the whole system. Jon suggested reaffirming the Panel's original action requesting a better-designed aerial alignment. The Panel thanked Mary Jo and Sound Transit for exploring these other options at the Panel's request.

Matthew Kitchen added that he believes the Panel can also do a better job of clarifying its role and focus by recognizing that the LPA has been voted on and the SEPA process is over. Given that alignments are essentially chosen, he recommends getting on with ensuring quality design. He added that he doesn't want the Panel's reconsideration of McClellan alignment to be confusing to the community, which was otherwise led to believe the decision was made. At this, a community member in the audience said she has concerns about the aerial alignment looking like a freeway on-ramp. More Panel discussion continued:

- Urban design isn't just street furniture! This is about the larger issues of how a space functions and looks, and how it supports other desired activities.
- The community is concerned about the size and scale of a mixed-use building at this site, but hasn't seen any designs that address urban design and development in a visionary way. Good design will be vital in getting the community to see and understand what is possible and what the real impacts and benefits might be.
- I agree; there may or may not be different ways to mass the station and development, but we need to develop more ideas. The initial "waterbug" idea didn't get shown either.
- Remember that we also want to talk about tunnel interiors and train interiors. What will it be like to be "in the tube?"
- The Design Guidelines currently being drafted by the City should help lay out the system level issues to discuss. *(We will be presenting train interiors soon to the Board, but it honestly didn't occur to me to show them to the Panel! We just finished a 2-day session with vehicle consultants.)*
- Some of the vehicles in Melbourne are quite nice.

With that, the Panel reaffirmed it's earlier action from January 26th, 2000 on McClellan, requesting further work on the urban design aspects of the station and surrounding area.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.